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Expanding the Contributions of bell hooks: Through the Lens of Adult Education

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Keywords: adult education, feminist pedagogy, popular culture

Abstract: The purpose of this roundtable is to discuss hook's influence in the field of adult education and her contributions. We will explore four key areas: 1) adult teaching and learning pedagogy, 2) adults and popular culture, 3) feminism and diverse women's issues, and 4) diversity and liberatory pedagogy.

Introduction

When we look to examine and address the history of adult education, embedded in its history is a story that has not always been inclusive regarding the experiences, histories, practices, and contributions of diverse adults or educational providers. The interdisciplinary nature of the field has allowed us to look for voices that have contributed to our knowledge of adult education research theory and practice. Of the many contributors in this regard are Paulo Freire, Ira Shor, Myles Horton (Freire, 1970; Horton & Freire, 1990; Shor, 1987; Shor & Freire, 1987) and most importantly for the purposes of this paper, bell hooks (hooks, 1994, 1996, 2000a, 2000b, 2006). In particular, this discussion is important because bell hooks has promoted the development of scholarship and pedagogy that has influenced our thinking on many levels in adult education.

bell hooks is a noted scholar, intellectual activist, and cultural/social critic. She is currently a professor at Berea College in Kentucky. She is the author of more than 25 books, and appears in more than 10 films. Although hooks is well known through other educational venues, her work in the adult education context is unexplored. Her work examines and questions defiance, struggle, and core issues that are critical to the socio-political fabric of society. She challenges educators to push against the boundaries of exclusion and welcome new ways of being that fosters an inclusiveness focused on the common good for a global community. The purpose of this paper is to discuss hook's influence in the field of adult education and her contributions in four key areas: 1) adult teaching and learning pedagogy (hooks, 1994), 2) adults and popular culture (hooks, 1996), 3) feminism and diverse women's issues (hooks, 2000a), and 4) diversity and liberatory pedagogy (hooks, 2000b).

Adult Teaching and Learning Pedagogy

hooks' ideas about pedagogy and her work with Paulo Freire encourages us to expand the space so that all voices can be heard and brought into the dialogue. As an educator, she talks about the courage to have compassion, engage in risk-taking, the power of love and the practice of servant-leadership in the effort toward a more human global community. hooks (1994) points out that "to teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential..." (p.78).

Adults and Popular Culture

hooks critiques the representations of adults and the ways within which adults are influenced by various aspects and mediums of popular culture, including television, films, music, and popular literature. She also recognizes the power of popular culture as the place where most

adult education occurs and adults are most likely to participate. For example, how do the current presidential debates serve to educate adults so that they can engage in participatory democracy?

Feminism and Diverse Women's Issues

hooks is at the forefront of the conversation of feminist pedagogical thought, the role of women, and the issues that affect their private and public lives. She critiques feminism and feminist thought and its focus on white women and utilizes this critique to integrate diverse voices into the discourse. hooks also challenges us to engage in the exploration of all possibilities that exist in the lives of all women, which operate to exploit, objectify, and oppress them. She also suggests that the powerful agents positioned to do the most constructive work on the behalf of women will come from those women who have knowledge of life, both in the margin and in the center.

Diversity and Libratory Pedagogy

hooks challenges the boundaries of life at the intersection of class, race, gender, color, culture, and sexual orientation, patriarchy, and hegemony. Her work informs and wrestles with the complexity of promoting harmony in a diverse and global society centered upon interests, power, and politics. She continually pushes us to engage in multiple levels of analysis by advocating liberating methods or perspectives that reveal dominant ideology. In addition, she continually takes risks by proposing situated critical pedagogy to adults about individual and systemic matters that appear problematic to their perceptions.

Discussion

Our roundtable discussion will further expand on the four key areas above and explore hooks' influence on the field of adult education. Our key questions to start the discussion are: 1) How do hooks' noted contributions play themselves out in the field of adult education? 2) How has she influenced the development of adult education theory? and, 3) How can we, as adult educators, further promote her work? Through this discussion, participants in this roundtable can contribute to an enriched understanding of hooks and the relevancy of her work to adult education.

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